

The Herald, its readers,
syndicated columnists and
cartoonists discuss vital issues



The Herald Comments

Provo Open To Be Historic

It's not often that a golf tournament on a local level will draw some of the best talent in the Intermountain area to Utah County, yet come May 10-12, fans will have a chance to see the best at the 1984 version of the Provo Open at Timpanogos Golf Club.

This tournament not only brings the best golfers here, but money into the community and perhaps most important — the proceeds of the tourney above expenses — will be donated to the

Utah County Boys' Club.

Not only is this one of the richest pro tournaments in Utah (a \$17,000 purse), but it'll be the last of the Provo Opens to be played at the old Timp golf course in Provo.

This is the 44th year for the Provo Open. The event has been won by some of the best golfers to ever pick up a club, such as Billy Casper. And those fans who venture out on Timp this May will see bulldozers and earthmovers.

A new Timp is being scratched out of the dirt just south of the present course. The existing 18 holes will be turned into a rather unique industrial park.

So a bit of history is going the way of progress, but come next year, golf course architects hope to have a new Timpanogos ready for the pros and weekend duffers.

The Timpanogos Men's Golf Association is putting on this year's show along with Central Bank. A good turnout

will not only ensure the future success of the tournament, but badly needed funds will go to help youngsters who receive guidance through the Boys' Club.

So what better way to spend a spring weekend than watching the pros and amateurs battling it out on a golf course, while sharing in some of the success of the tournament and the good it does for tourism, sports and youngsters?

Remember, that's May 10-12.

A Salute to Local Pioneers of Air

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When we think of modern-day pioneers, Merrill D. and Lucile W. Christopherson of Provo rate a place high on the list.

They have been a great team in pioneering aviation expansion and development here — husband and wife, aviator and aviatrix ... business partners who jointly planned, risked and labored to make their free-enterprise venture go.

And go it did, to the Provo area's lasting advantage.

Countless persons have benefited — learning to fly, taking charter flights and travel tours, and using the airfield Provo City developed with the active participation of the Christophersons and others. Merrill was airport manager for 27 years.

The Christopherson story is far too big for this space. But here are some highlights from my long-time observations and interviews with them:

I remember Merrill as a young, enthusiastic Boy Scout executive. Having received his master's degree at Columbia, he became a professional with the Utah National Parks Council at Provo in 1934. He married Lucile Weenig the next year.

Merrill learned to fly in 1939 under Vern Carter, one of Utah's pioneer aviators. Soon the "wild blue yonder" began to beckon with career possibilities. Lucile shared the new interest. In 1940 she became the 10th woman in Utah history to receive a pilot's license.

At that time, the nation was

sadly short of pilots and aircraft. The government had instituted Civil Pilot Training to overcome the deficiency. Merrill was urged by Joe Bergin, then Utah aeronautics director, to start a flight program. He and Lucile organized the Provo Flying Service in 1940.

Finding a suitable airfield was their first hurdle. The old First Ward Pasture in south Provo had served as the airport a number of years. But it was closed as inadequate and unsafe after a tragic accident in 1938.

With the cooperation of Mayor Mark Anderson, a flight field was chosen near the present airport location.

Merrill and Lucile piloted a new airplane from Lock Haven, Pa., set up an office in a tent at the landing strip, and started training their first 10 students. Their initial flight instructor was Gene Seal.

The Provo Airport, basically the modern airfield we know today insofar as the runways layout is concerned, was built by the U.S. Army, Civil Aeronautics Administration and Provo City. It was completed in 1943 at a cost of \$822,636.

(With the continued development, improvements and growth of aviation, there are now three airplane and two helicopter flight operators at the airport, with 155 aircraft and about 50,000 takeoffs and landings a year, according to Jim Mathis, airport manager.)

The Christopherson's flight



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program accelerated as a result of the new airport facility. Altogether, over 22 years they provided flight training for approximately 4,000 persons.

Merrill and Lucile became airplane distributors in 1945. They sold about 250 Ercoupes and Stinsons in Utah, Idaho and Nevada. The planes were either ferried or freighted by rail from the East. One interesting photo in Lucile's huge scrapbook shows six wingless planes taxiing down Center Street toward the airport, having been assembled to that point at the train depot.

Merrill still had scouting in his blood and found a unique way to encourage it. Over two decades, he gave free plane rides to 1,300 boys whose troops met certain standards of excel-

lence.

The two sons and two daughters of Merrill and Lucile — Kent, Robert, Mary and Ann — all became pilots, continuing the family flying tradition.

My own family was among the beneficiaries of the countless charter flights made by the Christophersons. Merrill and his cousin Lynn Christopherson flew two ambulance-equipped planes to Burley, Idaho, to fly my wife and me and two daughters home after a serious auto accident. How pleased we were with their courtesy and the smooth ride.

Merrill and Lucile sold the Provo Flying Service to Robert and James Burr in 1962. Meantime, they had organized the Christopherson Travel Service in 1953. They sold this to Weenig Enterprises two years ago after 29 eventful years that included 208 trips to Hawaii, 33 to Alaska, and tours to many other parts of the world.

In retirement the Christophersons still have their own plane. At age 79, Merrill once again passed the medical exam for flying. But two weeks later he suffered a mild stroke, from which he is still recovering.

Flying or on the ground, he and Lucile will always be devotees of the airways. Their achievements in aviation have been far-reaching. I think it would be highly appropriate for Provo City or the Chamber of Commerce to arrange a suitable public recognition of their contribution.